



# The Secret Life of Bees

## Book/Film Talk

### Summary

The story follows the journey of 14-year-old Lily Owens, seeking to uncover the mystery of her late mother. Set in South Carolina during the summer of 1964 following the passing of civil rights legislation, Lily lives with her emotionally abusive father, T-Ray, and cared for by her African-American nanny, Rosaleen. Circumstance compels Lily to flee her childhood home and hostile father and head for Tiburon, SC, a town etched on the back of a Black Mary photo belonging to her mother. With Rosaleen in tow, they discover a honey farm run by the Boatwright family, three African-American sisters who open their home and hearts to the pair. It is here where Lily learns of her mother, the art of beekeeping, spirituality, and the inspiring power of women working together.

### Film as Text

- Flashback/flash forward & brief voice-overs at the film opening & ending
- Close shots of facial moods & objects; zoom, diegetic sound
- Low-key lighting/slow motion during emotionally-charged scenes
- Pan, stills

### Awards

- *New York Times* Bestseller
- 2004 Book Sense Book of the Year Awards
- Nominated for the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction (prestigious UK literary prize)
- Debuted at No. 3 at the box office; as of Dec. 2008, the film has made over 47m
- Won for “Favorite Movie Drama” & “Favorite Independent Movie” at People’s Choice Awards
- 7 NAACP Image Award nominations, winning for Outstanding Motion Picture

### Book/Film Comparison

- Creative imagery a powerful aspect of novel
- Cinematography paints the screen w/ low-lighting, sound effects, dramatic dialogue
- Close-up of faces show the nuances of mood; close-up of objects makes them larger than life
- The film omits a few key moments in the book; “Mary Day”, honey anointing
- Zach & Lily’s romance less unpacked, Lily and T-Ray’s last conversation changed for the film

### Classroom Media/Multiliteracy

- Themes; the social significance of the bees, race relations after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, motherhood
- Journaling
- “Have you ever written a letter you could never mail, but needed to write anyway?”

### Citations

**Book-** Kidd, Sue Monk. *The Secret Life of Bees*. Penguin Books, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, January 2003

**Film-** *The Secret Life of Bees*. Dir. Gina Prince-Bythewood. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008. Film